NPT/CONF.2010/PC.III/WP.37

Preparatory Committee for the 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

13 May 2009
English
Original: French

Third session
New York, 4-15 May 2009

Nuclear disarmament: a concrete step by France

Visit to France's former fissile material production facilities for nuclear weapons

Working paper submitted by France

1. France organized visits to its former fissile material production facilities for nuclear weapons at Pierrelatte and Marcoule, on 16 September 2008 by representatives of more than 40 States members of the Conference on Disarmament, and on 16 March 2009 by more than 20 non-governmental experts.

2. The visits fulfilled a commitment made by the French President in a speech given at Cherbourg on 21 March 2008 on defence policy, nuclear deterrence and disarmament. In that speech, the President made innovative proposals regarding disarmament. He also showed his desire for transparency by deciding inter alia to invite international experts to come to see the dismantling of the former fissile material production facilities for nuclear weapons at Pierrelatte and Marcoule.

3. During the tours, the participants had access to the former uranium enrichment plant at Pierrelatte and, at the Marcoule site, they visited one of the three plutonium-producing reactors being dismantled, as well as the former military reprocessing plant. They were thus able to see that France's decision, made in 1996, to cease all production of fissile material for its nuclear weapons and to dismantle its Pierrelatte and Marcoule facilities used for that production, has become a concrete and effective reality.

4. The visits were an unprecedented act of transparency on the part of a nuclear-weapon State, in that they constituted the first instance of such a State opening the doors of its former fissile material production facilities for nuclear weapons.

5. The initiative shows France's will to forge ahead in nuclear weapons fissile material cut-off, a priority in the disarmament process with the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. As the international experts who participated in the visit saw, the dismantling of the French facilities at Pierrelatte and Marcoule is indeed irreversible.

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6. This event also demonstrates France's commitment to continue making active and practical contributions to disarmament, at both the national and international levels. Under the auspices of the French presidency of the European Union, Europe for the first time developed ambitious initiatives on disarmament. With a view to the 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the European Union presented an action plan for disarmament, based on proposals made in Cherbourg, that was endorsed by the 27 Heads of State and Government of the European Union in December 2008.

7. In the action plan, France, together with its European Union partners, calls for the immediate start of negotiations without preconditions on a fissile material cut-off treaty and the observance of an immediate moratorium on the production of fissile materials. We also urge all States concerned to dismantle their fissile material production facilities. France hopes that the international community will join the European Union in supporting and carrying out this realistic and concrete plan of action.

8. As underlined by the President of the Republic in his speech in Cherbourg, France's commitment to disarmament is not limited to speeches and promises, but is translated into concrete action. France acts with transparency, and in doing so, builds confidence. The visits to Pierrelatte and Marcoule give further evidence of this. France hopes that other States will take similar action, as the commitment of all States is necessary for progress in the area of disarmament. Continued progress depends on trust, transparency and reciprocity.